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VII. PARAPHRASING IN THE *LIVRE DE PAIX* OF  
CHRISTINE DE PISAN OF THE *PARADISO*,  
III-V

Many of us remember Matthew Arnold's recommendation in the *Essay on the Study of Poetry* of the line from Dante's *Paradiso*, (III. 85)

E la sua voluntate è nostra pace

as a touchstone of poetic value. The independent beauty of this line may be questioned by comparison with some lines that follow near it. The words of Beatrice in the fifth canto, from the first verse through the twelfth, for example, seem to have a tonal sweetness, with a richness of ethical content that might somewhat more justly be cited to illustrate Matthew Arnold's point. Few isolated lines, however, really shine out by themselves from any poet. We read or recall them with the mood induced by their setting. Climaxes they may be, but their sovereign value depends on the sequence, as the ear and the mind are addressed together, perhaps.

I am very much aware of this condition in the natural laws of persuasion in even the small examination undertaken here. Citations may illustrate a situation; they can rarely prove it, even within the limits of any probable truth. The evidence is the whole works in question, or considerable portions of them. But as the object of any essay is to incite curiosity as to the whole compositions cited I venture a few observations of which the starting point for myself was the line in question, which so profoundly impressed Matthew Arnold, as he read it along with its context, perhaps more with the eye than the ear. For Romance poetry, and even for the Classics, this was more the English habit than now. Matthew Arnold shared a little this limitation.

It may be that his sensitiveness to the line was affected by his certain familiarity with what seems to be its chief

ultimate source. No one had read in his day more closely the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians,—*Paulus, apostolus Jesu Christi per voluntatem Dei*, in the Vulgate, to the saints at Ephesus, faithful in Jesus Christ. To the Gentiles of Asia Minor, of more or less Hellenistic culture such as he had duly absorbed at Tarsus, Paul applies a combination of very simple ethical precept with a philosophical definition more dogmatic than he offered the Greeks of the mainland; he is groping less for their metaphysics; he knows better their political need. Moreover, he is writing from Rome. The tone is what we recognize under the more or less approximate names of Latin, Puritan, or more accurately, as Hellenistic Hebraic, or simply Hellenistic as the Roman Stoics adopt it. Axiom, aphorism, a somewhat mystical note of authority, is more its method than open persuasion; it seeks, to impose and imposes by sudden flashes of truth. Thus we have the verse, (ii. 14) beginning:

*Ipse enim est pax nostra*

in the version Dante read, which was probably more immediately in his memory in the *Paradiso* than the comments of the Fathers upon it, though he must have known more than one.

If it is not improbable that the *Paradiso* was written at Ravenna it may not be fantastic to see in its manner, possibly in its very structure, a certain Byzantine Greek effect. We have no reason for supposing Dante more insensible than many modern students and visitors to the tradition of the place, to its architecture, its location and significance. The historical imagination of the Middle Ages has been singularly misunderstood, perhaps out of the very paucity in general of our own. Nothing about them is actually more constant and striking, once we have made the considerable mental effort of realizing that, as the late Professor Schofield reminded his students with much more of eloquence, justice, and application than has found a place in his writing, the mediaeval imagination could act almost

impersonally. The Romantic search for local color to adorn its subjectivity has dulled our conception of the inverse process in any genuine Renaissance moment.

Impersonally when Christine de Pisan wrote her *Livre de Paix* for the Duc de Guienne in 1412 she finds her situation and that of her country the just occasion for analyzing out of her studies as many of the essentials as possible of Greek philosophy,—what Paul cited, and Cicero and Sallust and Seneca and Boëthius knew. Gerson had specially recommended Cicero to her. He was comparatively a novelty in the learned court circle, though well known at Notre Dame. The *De natura deorum*, and the *Disputationes Tusculanae* had not been translated!

*Fiat pax in virtute tua* she inscribes the work. The literal phrase will not be found, I think, in any of her principal sources, Cicero, Seneca, Quintillian, the Bible, or Dante. What she does, as it seems to me, is to give the new Romance sense of virtue, *vertu*, *virtù*, to the Latin, the psychological interpretation of the Victorine School, to the Will. The Will of God himself, the Holy Spirit, is reflected as the active virtue of man. This intellectualism is the higher mysticism of the Middle Ages, revived with fresh insight and practical application in her day and group.

*De la bouche des enfans et alailans.*

Voirement, Notre Seigneur, Roy celeste, tout puissant, qui deffaces et osten, quant il te plaist, le misere du monde, est ton plaisir d'avoir parfaite louenge, lequel est paix, si comme lors que tu ouvris les enfantines levres de Daniel pour la bonne Susanne, accusée à tort, respitée de mort.

Lake Dante, in his general structure, (and incidentally in much of the structure that marks all the Renaissance moments in the Middle as in other Ages), she goes on from specific to general conditions. She cites Cicero as authority, Cicero by and large, for the main conception that man's justice must open the window,—Cicero's *fenestræ animi* (Tusc. i. 20)—for the Light to come in. The Light,—Cicero's *lux liberalitatis*, (Ligar. iii)—will appear in clemency, truth, accomplishing a vital peace:

Te plaise, aussi, tres digne prince te maintenir entre les tiens en la maniere et selon le dit du philosophe Pitagoras, c'est assavoir unité, bonté et concorde. lesquelz biens sont tousieurs d'un mespris a tort. (MS. Fr. 1182, fol. 127 vo.)

She was remembering no doubt more than one passage from the *De Natura Deorum*, e. g.

Nam Pythagoras, qui censuit animum esse per naturam rerum omnem intentum et commeantem, ex quo nostri animi carperentur, non vidit, distractione humanorum animorum discerpi et lacerari deum (I.11).

*Deum esse animum per mundum permeantem, ejusque particulas animos nostros ad harmoniam canere mundum statuit.* Et ego quaero, unde orationem, unde numeros, unde cantus, nisi vero loqui solem cum luna putamus quum proprius accesserit aut ad harmoniam canere mundum, ut Pythagoras existimat (III. 11).

But she seems to hear more distinctly the lovely further words of Beatrice to her pupil in the heavenly mysteries:

Io veggio ben sì come già risplende  
nello intelletto tuo l'Eterna Luce  
che, vista sola, sempre amore accende (V.7-9);

in reminding the Duc de Guienne in conclusion that *entre les humaines choses riens n'est trouve plus doulz que amistié*. Christine may or may not have known the similar passages in the *Convivio*. That she did not seem to know the prose works of her Master when she wrote her own earlier poems is no evidence that she did not at the time that she, too, had turned to prose. The studies of Farinelli and the comments of Morf on the subject hardly extend beyond the range of her verse. Probability suggests that she may have owed something of her own shifting form and interest to Dante's example, though I have found no mention of the *Convivio* by name. But Dante was neither a Classic nor a Father; quotations from Romance authors were not always acknowledged in the fifteenth century more than now. Some almost contemporaries may have been perhaps too well known to the very special audience, as sometimes with allusions to-day. Independent logical process is also among the possibilities, where original sources are shared and actual

conditions of life or writing are somewhat analogous. At any rate a certain sequence of thought and emotion appears to extend somewhat strikingly from the Epistle to the Ephesians, through Dante, to the *Livre de Paix*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MS. Fr. 1182, (Bib. Nat. Paris), probably the original copy presented to the Duc de Guienne, which I have used both directly and by photograph for this study, has certain peculiarities that appear at intervals with other French philosophical writing down to and including Descartes. Besides the quotations from Latin classics, sometimes with exact references, sometimes general ones, there are marginal notes, in what seems to be the same hand as the text. More than one of these, like the summary from the *De Natura Deorum* given in italics on page 185, may be Christine's effort to elucidate her thought in the same language as her sources, and following Gerson's counsel to leave a high philosophical concept in the learned tongue. The Letters and Discourses of Cicero were known, too, in Italy sometime before we find them in the rest of Europe. The summary may be, of course, from some Italian edition she used, rather than of her own composition. On a larger scale, the fourth book of the *De Imitatione Christi*, glossing the French version of the three first books in the *Consolation Internelle*, presents analogies. The subtleties of learned vernacular composition at this period cannot be resolved with dogmatic certainty or established except by comparative and sensitive study.